

LESSON 7: GENDER AND IDENTITY

Objectives

- To continue observation of sociocultural expectations based on gender
- To begin examining the ways in which gender roles impact an individual's identity
- To characterize features of written poetry
- To write poetry demonstrating students' ideas about pressures and expectations for men and women in their own cultures

Materials

Poetry that challenges or exposes the limitations of traditional gender roles in some way. I use:

- UNIT MATERIALS: "Barbie doll" by Marge Piercy
- UNIT MATERIALS: "Sometimes a man stands up during supper . . ." by Rainer Maria Rilke
- UNIT MATERIALS: "A work of artifice" by Marge Piercy
- UNIT MATERIALS: "Prayer" by Alan Dugan
- HANDOUT 5: POETRY GROUP WORK TASKS
- SAMPLE STUDENT-WRITTEN POETRY (included for teachers' reference)

Procedures

- Divide poems into pairs. I pair "Barbie doll" with "Sometimes a man stands up during supper . . ." and "Prayer" with "A work of artifice."
- Give each student a copy of HANDOUT 5: POETRY GROUP WORK TASKS. Go over directions with students altogether. Divide class into small groups of four or five. Distribute one pair of poems to each group.
- In groups, students are to read each of their two poems and answer short questions on them. This will generate discussions of familial and societal expectations based on gender.
- After group work, each of the four poems should be read aloud by a student. Take this time to go over any puzzling sections or phrases in poetry. Discuss poems as a class, using the questions on the handouts as a starting point.

- After poetry readings, explications, and discussions, each student must write a new version of one of the poems (e.g., a "Ken Doll" version of "Barbie doll" poem, "Sometimes a Woman" for Rilke's "Sometimes a man stands up during supper . . ."). See SAMPLE STUDENT-WRITTEN POETRY. Read and discuss these examples aloud to illustrate the assignment, if desired.

HANDOUT 5: POETRY GROUP WORK TASKS

Names of people in group: _____

Your group has been given copies of two poems. You will work with both poems.

Someone in your group needs to read each of the poems aloud.

Answer the following questions on each of the poems:

Poem 1 Title: _____

1. Which gender is in focus?
2. According to the poem, what are the expectations for people of this gender?
3. According to the poem, what are the consequences of meeting those expectations?
4. According to the poem, what are the consequences of not meeting those expectations?
5. Characterize the style in which the poem is written (conversational, mysterious, sarcastic, detailed, excited, calm, etc.).

Poem 2 Title: _____

1. Which gender is in focus?
2. According to the poem, what are the expectations for people of this gender?
3. According to the poem, what are the consequences of meeting those expectations?
4. According to the poem, what are the consequences of not meeting those expectations?
5. Characterize the style in which the poem is written (conversational, mysterious, sarcastic, detailed, excited, calm, etc.).

Independent Work

After answering these questions and hearing the other two poems, start thinking about with which of the four poems you want to work.

UNIT MATERIALS

Barbie doll

by Marge Piercy

This girl child was born as usual
and presented dolls that did pee-pee
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose and on thick legs.

She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
a turned up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

SOURCE: "Barbie doll" by Marge Piercy. From CIRCLES ON THE WATER. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright © 1971, 1973, 1982 by Marge Piercy. Used by permission of the Wallace Literary Agency, Inc., and Random House, Inc.

UNIT MATERIALS

Sometimes a man stands up during supper . . .

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Sometimes a man stands up during supper
and walks outside, and keeps walking
because of a church that stands somewhere
in the East.

And his children say blessings on him as if
he were dead.

And another man remains in his own house,
stays there, inside the dishes and in the glasses,
so that his children have to go far out into the world
toward that same church, which he forgot.

SOURCE: "Sometimes a man stands up during supper . . ." by Rainer Maria Rilke.
From *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Copyright © 1981. HarperCollins
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UNIT MATERIALS

A work of artifice*by Marge Piercy*

The bonsai tree
in the attractive pot
could have grown eighty feet tall
on the side of a mountain
til split by lightning:
But a gardener
carefully pruned it.
It is nine inches high.
Every day as he
whittles back the branches
the gardener croons,
It is your nature
to be small and cozy,
domestic and weak;
how lucky, little tree,
to have a pot to grow in.
With living creatures
one must begin very early
to dwarf their growth:
the bound feet,
the crippled brain,
the hair in curlers,
the hands you
love to touch.

SOURCE: "A work of artifice" by Marge Piercy. From CIRCLES ON THE WATER. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Copyright © 1971, 1973, 1982 by Marge Piercy. Used by permission of the Wallace Literary Agency, Inc., and Random House, Inc.

UNIT MATERIALS

Prayer

by Alan Dugan

God, I need a job because I need money.
Here the world is, enjoyable with whiskey,
women, ultimate weapons, and class!
But if I have no money, then my wife
gets mad at me, I can't drink well,
the armed oppress me, and no boss,
pays me money. But when I work,
Oh I get paid!, the police are courteous,
and I can have a drink and breathe air.
I feel classy. I am where the arms are.
The wife is wife in deed. The world
is interesting! except I have to be
indoors all day and take shit, and make
weapons to kill outsiders with. I miss
the air and smell that paid work stinks
when done for somebody else's profit, so I quit,
enjoy a few flush days in air, drunk, then
I need a job again. I'm caught in a steel cycle.

SOURCE: "Prayer" by Alan Dugan, copyright © 1961, 1962, 1968, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1983 by Alan Dugan. From *NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS 1961-1983*, first published by Ecco Press (Hopewell, NJ) in 1983. Reprinted by permission. (Poem also found in A. Poulin, Jr. [Ed.], *Contemporary American poetry*, pp. 117-118, New York: Houghton Mifflin.)

SAMPLE STUDENT-WRITTEN POETRY

Ken Doll
(after Piercy's "Barbie doll")*by Mike (1992)*

This boy child was born as usual
and presented racecars that spit fire
and miniature GI Joes and Ninja Turtles
and tiny guns and robots that fit together like weapons.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have big hips and you walk like a girl.

He was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
He went to and fro keeping to himself.
Everyone saw big hips and a swish when he walked.

He was told to play tough,
Had to come on strong,
Lift weights, fight everyone, be bold, and talk loud.
His good nature wore out
Like a fan belt.
So he went out one night and killed someone he didn't even know
And offered him up.

In the jail he lies on his cot
Staring at the ceiling,
Cigarette hanging from his mouth,
in his blue uniform.
Ain't he a man? everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every man a happy ending.

Woman's Prayer
(after Dugan's "Prayer")

by Candace (1990)

God, I need a man because I need reputation.
Here the world is, enjoyable with clothes,
flirting, nights on the town, and class!
But if I don't have a man, then my friends
pity me, I never feel like going out,
my teachers oppress me, and what my boss
pays me isn't enough. But when I have a man,
Oh I get paid! My friends envy me,
and I can have a drink and breathe air.
I feel classy. I am where the action is.
I am a woman in deed. The world
is interesting! Except I have to be
indoors all the time and take his shit, and
Lie to everyone and say how great he is.
I miss my freedom and feel tied down to
someone else's happiness, so we break up,
enjoy a few days of freedom, drunk, then
I need a man again. I'm caught in a steel cycle.

Sometimes a Woman
(after Rilke's "Sometimes a man stands up
during supper . . .")

by Anonymous (1990)

Sometimes a woman stands up during her pregnancy
and goes to the clinic, and walks out a few hours later,
because of a future that stands somewhere
in her own mind.

And her parents and her boyfriend curse her as if
she was dead.

And another woman has the baby,
lives there, inside the diapers and days of babysitting
so that her boyfriend can go out into the world
toward a future, which she had to forget.

LESSON 8: EXAMINING A FORMAL THEORY OF POWER

Objectives

- To introduce students to a formal scheme for analyzing use and abuse of power
- To give students practice applying this framework to fictional and real-life characters

Materials

- HANDOUT 6: POWER SCENARIOS

Procedures

- Introduce students to terminology associated with Michel Foucault's analysis of power dynamics. Foucault (1980) names four types of power: custodial, indoctrinary, visionary, and oppressive. Students usually grasp this easily. They should take notes for future reference. Ideas to discuss are as follows:

Almost every powerful action can be classified as one of the following four types: custodial power, indoctrinary power, visionary power, and oppressive power. It is possible for a person to have more than one type of power or for an act to be classified in more than one category.

1. Custodial: This is the type of power that includes caretaking, record keeping, and monitoring. It, like all types of power, can be abused when it is used to repress rather than to sustain and nurture. Some people who have custodial powers are teachers, parents, police, the IRS, and pet owners.
2. Indoctrinary: This is the type of power that includes consciously persuading, educating, or otherwise informing another person. People who use indoctrinary power usually have an agenda they wish to further. Politicians, teachers, lawyers, and advertisers use indoctrinary power.
3. Visionary: This is the type of power exercised by charismatic leaders, entertainers, and preachers. Visionary power appeals to the soul, taking the listener out of his or her world and creating a new vision altogether. Dr. Martin Luther King, many evangelists, and some musicians have this power.
4. Oppressive: Although all types of power can be used abusively, oppressive power is the force in play during acts of cruelty, hatred, and violence. Oppressive power exists only to hurt—there is no other motive (such as nurturing, educating, or inspiring).

- Encourage students to think of, discuss, and debate examples of each type of power.
- Distribute HANDOUT 6: POWER SCENARIOS. Students may work on this alone or in groups.
- Apply these terms and concepts to characters and relationships in "The Pearl of Toledo," "Girlfriends," and to sex roles poetry. If class is willing, students can use these categories to review their Journal 1 and 2 entries in discussion or in writing.

HANDOUT 6: POWER SCENARIOS

Directions: Read the following scenarios and determine what type of power each represents. Many illustrate more than one type of power. You need to decide which type is most prevalent.

1. David Churlish: Churlish has been leading a group of people who believe that he is the messenger of God. Recently a group of investigative reporters searched and found Churlish in the deepest, most isolated part of a Louisiana bayou. They described Churlish as an obese man with no hair who most resembled a wild pig. His hut was guarded by 50 believers armed with sharpened spears. The hut was surrounded by a fence on which were hung shrunken heads. From afar the reporters watched the group perform bizarre rituals of sacrifice over which Churlish presided. At another time, they witnessed a meeting of some sort, at which Churlish sat on a throne. Another man jumped up and down on a raised platform and danced wildly. This seemed to hypnotize the crowd, who immediately filed past Churlish, kissed his feet, offered up jewelry and stereo equipment, and sacrificed their youngest daughters. The reporters thought it best to leave Churlish alone.

2. Colon Powerful: Powerful is a top military officer. He is well regarded as a competent and rational man who smokes expensive cigars. Although he is extremely short, standing only 4 ft. 9 in., he has overcome his size to gain friends and influence important people. Powerful began as a drill sergeant. He was famous for his obsession with details and for his systematic way of promoting people. Not a single soldier in his troop could get away with a small wrinkle or smudge on his uniform or his record. He never yells—he has lieutenants for that. He runs a very tight ship. His officers keep precise records on everything from ammunitions ordered to Kleenexes used. There is no room for error.

3. Sigmund Skinner: Sigmund is a famous professor of psychology. A rather ugly man with embarrassing nostril hair, Sigmund always has felt uneasy about his appearance. Consequently, he spent his entire life defining what is normal. He is most famous for creating a system of rewards and punishments that trained deviant chickens to become normal laboratory rats. He later applied his methods to schoolchildren and established a school named after his mother, Beatrice. Through a meticulous keeping of records, files, and progress reports, Sigmund managed to produce a class of 12-year-olds who looked and behaved exactly like him. Fortunately, Sigmund quickly was locked away. His system, however, is alive and well in some American public school systems.

4. Mother Jones: Mother Jones, or Mother as her friends call her, is well known in some political circles, although she never participates in negotiations or treaties. Mother leads small groups of people who help to find and build housing for the homeless and food kitchens for the hungry. She rarely speaks in public but seems to deeply affect everyone she comes into contact

with. She uses simple words effectively and sincerely. She leads many people to religion with her kindness and the example of her selfless life.

5. Jackie Lord: Lord controls a large business empire that includes companies in world capitals as well as her hometown, Podunk, Arkansas. Lord is a master analyst who keeps firm, if not always legal, control of her holdings (which include as many people as dollars). She has several connections with the underworld, using those thugs to keep investors investing. In order to assure the mob's loyalty, she also runs a secret service that has all the dirt on the mob. She is well respected and is, in fact, thinking of running for senator. She keeps her name clean by effectively controlling all would-be informers: She has them chopped into tiny bits and sells them to frozen food companies as sausage.

LESSON 9: SEX ROLES, POWER, AND IDENTITY IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

Objectives

- To read and understand the novel in entirety
- To discuss gender roles, power, and identity as they impact characters in the novel
- To work effectively in groups, especially on textual analysis
- To write creative, reflective pieces based on themes in the novel and these works
- To become conversant with the concepts of claims, evidence, and warrants
- To develop abilities to make claims about literary works and themes, search text for evidence to support claims, and generate warrants for claims and evidence
- To complete prewriting exercises and understand formal writing structures

Materials

- Walker, Alice, *The Color Purple*
- HANDOUT 7: CASEWORKER ASSIGNMENT
- HANDOUT 8: PROVING A POINT IN AN ESSAY
- HANDOUT 9: CELIE'S IDENTITY
- HANDOUT 10: CELIE AND MEN AND WOMEN
- HANDOUT 11: GENDER STEREOTYPES IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*
- HANDOUT 12: POWER IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*
- HANDOUT L: CLAIMS, EVIDENCE, AND WARRANTS (see Chapter 4)
- HANDOUT M: EVALUATING SOURCES OF EVIDENCE (see Chapter 4)

Procedures

- *Activity A: Initial Ideas About The Color Purple.* Begin reading *The Color Purple*. Students will want to discuss narrator's childish and uneducated narrative voice. Distribute HANDOUT 7: CASEWORKER ASSIGNMENT. Ask students to imagine the following scenario: They are social workers assigned

to 14-year-old Celie. They must prepare a factual report on the events covered in the first 12 pages of the novel.

- *Activity B: Discussing **The Color Purple**.* The following questions can be used to start general class discussions.

Pages 1-22. Why is this book written in nonstandard, incorrect English? What information does this give us about Celie? What are Celie's feelings toward her father? Toward Nettie? Why does Celie marry Mr. __? Why does Mr. __ marry Celie? When Kate and Celie discuss power on page 22, Celie considers her own situation. Do you think she has any power?

Pages 23-55. What type of power does Shug have over Celie? Over Mr. __? What type of power does Sofia have over Harpo? Does he have any type of power over her? Why does Celie tell Harpo to beat Sofia? What does Shug Avery represent to make Celie obsess over her? How does Shug show her power over Mr. __? Are Shug and Celie friends?

Pages 56-83. Explain Celie's happiness with Shug in the house. What do you think about Harpo's ideas about power and marriage? Why does Sofia leave Harpo? How does Celie feel about Shug when she sings? Why does she finally decide to tell Shug about Mr. __ beating her, that is, how does Celie gain power over Shug? What type of power is it?

Pages 84-118. What happens to Sofia? How does this decrease her power? How does it increase her power? Why does the family decide to send Squeak to speak to the prison warden? What changes does this visit bring about in Squeak? How does Sofia feel about her White employers? How does Celie telling Shug about her father raping her at 13 change the women's relationship? Do you think this change came as a surprise to Celie? To Shug?

Pages 119-151. Why had Celie not received any letters from Nettie? What has happened to Nettie? What is Nettie's mission in life? Why are Nettie's impressions of New York significant? What conflicts exist in Nettie's mind (see p. 145)? How does Shug talk Celie out of killing Mr. __?

Pages 152-198. What are sex roles for Olinka boys and girls? How does Olivia link sexism and racism? Are Tashi's parents superstitious (see pp. 166-167)? What changes does the new road bring to the village? Why did Samuel and Corrine adopt Olivia and Adam? What does Celie gain from visiting the man she thought was her Pa? How does Nettie finally put Corinne's mind at rest?

Pages 199-228. Why does Celie stop writing to God? What brings Nettie and Samuel together? Who in this book is deeply spiritual? Would Nettie agree with Shug's thoughts on religion (pp. 202-204)? What is Celie's response to Mr. __'s refusal to let her leave? Does Mr. __ seem affected by the curse Celie lays on him as she goes (p. 213)? Why does Celie succeed in her business venture?

Pages 229-249. How has Mr. __ changed his ways? Why? What happened to the Olinka village? How did the African chief show respect for Doris Baines,

2. There are strict sex roles for men and women to follow in both the southern American and Olinka cultures. In your opinion, which society is more repressive? Give at least four reasons for your answer.

- *Activity E: Applying Formal Theories of Power.* Discussions of *The Color Purple* will gain depth and relevance if instructors teach Lesson 8: Examining a Formal Theory of Power before or while students read the novel. Once students become comfortable with Foucault's categories, assign short group writing or discussion assignments analyzing the power dynamics of relationships in *The Color Purple*. For example:

What type of power do Pa and Mr. ___ have over Celie? Explain using textual citations.

What type of power does Shug first have over Celie? Explain using textual citations.

What type of power does Sofia first have over Harpo? Explain using textual citations.

- *Activity F: Betrayal.* When students have read of Mr. ___'s concealment of Nettie's letters, assign Journal 3: When have you experienced a betrayal such as Celie's? Issues of (women's, children's, or people of color's) powerlessness may arise. Teachers should beware of returning journal writing marked with lots of mechanics or other corrections: These are private pieces. Students have told me that they resent it when I "correct their lives" and generally appreciate more personal responses. Correct and edit other, less confessional writing assignments.

- *Activity G: Introducing Essay Writing Skills.* Introduce the concept of substantiated claims by distributing HANDOUT 8: PROVING A POINT IN AN ESSAY. This sheet and the following procedures should be completed by students in class together.

After students understand the basic criteria for proving a point in an essay, begin with basics: Explain what a *claim* is. Give examples: Girls in this class are smarter than boys. The sky is blue. Michael Jordan is the best basketball player ever. Make it clear that the most interesting claims are the ones that state a bold, controversial point. ("The sky is blue" is not much of a claim because it isn't all that bold a statement.)

Next, go on to *evidence*: What proof do we have that girls are smarter than boys? (Girls' average test scores are 75; boys' are 71.) That the sky is blue? (We can look outside and see for ourselves.) That Michael Jordan is the best? (He led the NBA in scoring for 6 consecutive years.) The students may tell you that your evidence does not prove anything. (If they don't, ask if this proof would suffice: Girls are smarter because they wear nicer clothes. Michael Jordan was the best because his head is the shiniest.)

Also useful at this point is HANDOUT M: EVALUATING SOURCES OF EVIDENCE (see Chapter 4). Good sources of evidence are impartial, up-to-date, and knowledgeable.

Not all proof "works." That is because it is not warranted. Explain to students that a *warrant* is the part of an argument that explains why the

evidence proves the point. Ask the class to explain what the word *warrant* means to them: They might say that a warrant gives an individual the right to do something, such as arrest someone. It is a guarantee, authorizing and justifying an action. In an argument, a warrant justifies and puts an official stamp of authorization on evidence. It is the part that is missing most often in student writing. Warrants for the above claims would be like this:

CLAIM	EVIDENCE	WARRANT
1. Girls in this class are smarter than boys.	Girls' average test score is 75; boys' is 71.	Test scores give some measure of intelligence.
2. The sky is blue.	I look up and see blue.	I am outside looking up and seeing blue sky.
3. Michael Jordan is the best basketball player ever.	He led the league in scoring six consecutive seasons.	Scoring points is one measure of skill. No other player has ever done this.

Have students generate warrants for unrelated, supplied claims and evidence. Use HANDOUT L: CLAIMS, EVIDENCE, AND WARRANTS (see Chapter 4). It is best to do this together in class.

Continue prewriting for essays by having students complete progressively more difficult claim-evidence-warrant worksheets. Assign any of the following provided worksheets. Some need to be done in class; some can be done independently. Make sure students save all claim-evidence-warrant worksheets for use in their essays.

Activities H through K help students write their final essays.

- *Activity H: Prewriting/Finding Good Evidence.* When students are up to about page 80 in *The Color Purple*, distribute HANDOUT 9: CELIE'S IDENTITY. Students will work independently to find quoted evidence and deduce claims based on the evidence they have found. When students have finished this sheet, go over sample student responses until all students seem to grasp the basic idea.

- *Activity I: Prewriting/Warranting Evidence.* Next, distribute HANDOUT 10: CELIE AND MEN AND WOMEN. With partners, students can find two pieces of relevant evidence. Students then work alone—or continue with partners—to generate warrants for supplied claims. Review and discuss particularly strong warrants with the class as a whole.

- *Activity J: Prewriting/Claims, Evidence, and Warrants and Gender Stereotypes.* Distribute HANDOUT 11: GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE COLOR PURPLE. The class generates claims together. Instructors can introduce this task by saying: "You are elders belonging to one of these cultural groups. You must instruct the local children on their roles in the families and in society. What will you say?"

Together the class writes four claims (two for southern, early 20th-century African American culture and two for traditional Olinka culture). Then divide students into small groups to find evidence. Finally, let individual students work on their own to supply warrants.

- *Activity K: Prewriting/Claims, Evidence, and Warrants and Power.* Distribute HANDOUT 12: POWER IN THE COLOR PURPLE. Students work on their own to supply claims, evidence, and warrants. This worksheet relies on the analytical framework introduced in Lesson 8.